most of whom belonged to the Quasimi clan, of which the Sheikh of Sharjah is the titular head. I have had many a joke with Sheikh Sultan and his nobles over stories of the old piratical days, and they were greatly amused to learn that my great-great-grandfather, who entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman in 1789, had taken part in a sortie against Sharjah in 1830, when his frigate shelled the town as a reprisal against a murderous attack on a British merchantman. I shall refer later to the history of piracy in Oman which, on account of the predatory raids on shipping, gained the title of 'the Pirate Coast' in the last century.

The town of Sharjah is built on the shores of the creek, the contour of which it follows in crescent shape until the open sea is reached; at low tide a spit of sand or 'bar', separates the creek from the Gulf. Only at low tide is it possible to cross the creek on foot and make the journey to Khan; on the far side of this sand-bridge or 'bar' there is a primitive wooden lighthouse, built by the sheikh for the guidance of the pearling boats, and a small colony of fishermen's huts. The residences of the merchants, which are all two-storeyed buildings with wide verandas and imposing gateways, are built facing the sea, a distinct advantage in the hot weather. When a breeze is blowing, they are cooler inside in the summer months than an air-conditioned room at the Fort, and much more pleasant.

The town is about half a mile in length, and an eighth of a mile wide, with narrow, crooked streets running through the centre, and quaint, dark alleyways formed by the back walls of the houses. I could never get accustomed to the twists and curves of these streets, some of which were wide enough for only two people to pass abreast, although the Arabs used to ride donkeys and camels through them. Little doorways would suddenly open in the walls, whilst from a window high up would descend a cascade of refuse or dirty water. Some of these doorways are extremely beautiful; shaped like the double doors of an old English church, they are set in a frame of decorated stone, and the unvarnished teak is studded with pointed brass knobs. Sometimes they are inset with a secondary door, large enough to admit one person.

One afternoon I accompanied the Station Engineer, Sparkes, to Sharjah on a shopping expedition; we took a mechanic, Mahmud, with us to act as interpreter. Sparkes wanted to haggle with one of the merchants, and rather impolitely declined to rely on my Arabic. He had recently purchased an old Arab seal, a large, oval

chalcedony stone with a faded inscription, and had taken it to the silversmith to have it made into a ring; the purpose of his visit was to collect and pay for it, not always a simple matter in Arabia, where the merchant normally demands twice the legitimate price and expects to be beaten down.

Mahmud, who is a Baluchi and lives with his family in the poorer part of the town, took us through the less salubrious quarter. Sharjah has no city wall proper, but its place is taken by a ring of filthy hovels, the palm-thatched barousti huts of the coolies, slaves and servants. The stench from these slums is unbearable in hot weather, for each hut dweller uses his front door as a cesspool and a refuse dump, and the place is infested with flies and insects; native children crawl about in the sand, and mangy pai dogs snarl at one's approach. These miserable hovels afford protection against neither sun nor rain, and it is remarkable that their poverty-stricken inhabitants are not afflicted with disease. The quarter is a disgrace to Sharjah town and, although the Political Officer has remonstrated with the sheikh about it, he refuses to have the place rebuilt.

It was a pleasant relief to pass into the cool, dim alleys leading to the town; many of them are roofed with palm-thatch and are comparatively clean. The walls are honeycombed with doorways, leading to the houses of the tradesmen and metalsmiths. After a walk of fifteen minutes through the maze of dark, winding streets, during the progress of which we were conscious of hundreds of dark eyes staring curiously at us, we reached the sugar market. This is a large square in the centre of the town; it is roofed-in with huge strips of palm-matting, supported by whitewashed wooden pillars, making it very dim inside.

Tethered to the pillars were six camels, snarling and grumbling; occasionally they tried to rise, but their forefeet were tied together and they would hobble for a few yards and quickly fall back on their knees. They had brought bags of sugar from a boat in the harbour, and their owners were arguing over prices with the brokers. The market, which is about six hundred feet square, contains warehouses, brokers' offices and shops on each side. We should have liked to take a photograph of it, but as Sparkes had no time-exposure on his camera he decided not to risk wasting his film.

The colour and variety of dress one sees in a native bazaar is remarkable. The women are the least attractive, their trousers, wraps and veils being of an unrelieved black; it is their menfolk

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

[Sharjah bazaar]

Chow. These narrow, twisting streets have changed little in the last four or five centuries, and a similar scene must have presented itself to Haroun al Raschid as, disguised as a beggar, he crept through the dark thoroughfares of Baghdad. When I was in Sharjah I read that his palace had been excavated, but the Arabs with whom I discussed this interesting piece of archæology were not interested. They have a superstitious dislike of Haroun, and do not like to talk about the *Arabian Nights*, though I could never discover the reason for this.

The tailors make up most of the Arab *abbas* and *kufieyhs* from imported cloth of Indian manufacture; before the war a great deal of woollen and cotton fabrics came from Manchester, but it will probably be some time before the English piece-goods market is extended to Arabia again. We examined their wares; Indian-made shirts imported from Karachi, soft, woollen Kashmir shawls with hand-embroidered designs of birds and flowers in glowing colours; rich silks, sarongs and turbans, and large bales of coloured cloth for Arab children.

The streets are always congested at this hour. Not only Arabs, but goats and donkeys, throng the narrow ways, so that one continually brushes shoulders with the crowd and cannot avoid its inescapable stench. The peasant women seem dirtier than the men; this is presumably because their black cotton garments do not show the dirt, and are therefore seldom washed. Many of the younger women walked about unveiled and, in spite of their belladonna-stained eyes and henna-red lips, some of them were astonishingly lovely. They gave us coquettish glances as we passed, but even the most amorously-inclined Westerner would lose his ardour if he inhaled the nauseating odour of their persons.

Before we left Sharjah, Hassan suggested that we should take a cup of Turkish tea, so we sauntered into an open-air tea shop and sat on hard benches polished by much use. A handsome young Arab brought us tall, narrow glasses containing very sweet, warm tea, unclouded by milk; it was very aromatic and agreeable. The benches were arranged in a square, in the centre of which were stalls displaying cakes and sweetmeats, a large urn, and the inevitable gramophone. An old Arab sat smoking his hubble-bubble and changing the records; in return for this service he was supplied by the proprietor with free tea. The words of the songs, which Hassan translated for our benefit, were mostly concerned with the plaintive laments of unsuccessful lovers, suggesting that the crooner's

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

361 coco-nut trees grow down to the shore on either side of the creek, on the southern side of which is a palm-mat 'summer palace' belonging to the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah, now used to house a discarded wife. The town is divided by the creek into two sections—Dubai proper, where the merchants and wealthier classes live, and Dera, the fishermen's quarter. We made for the latter and moored alongside a primitive wooden jetty beside which large pearling dhows were undergoing a careen.

342 The streets of Dera are filthy in the extreme, the inhabitants living in hovels roofed with palm-matting supported by wooden joists. The only presentable house was the coral and mortar residence of Ali, the Anglo-Persian Company's agent in Dubai; we stopped here for a few minutes and had a cup of tea made with 438 condensed milk. The Arabs, whose chief occupation is pearl 164 diving, fishing, shipbuilding and wool-weaving, were ragged and unkempt; many had sores on their legs and arms, and appeared to be suffering from eye infections. Many of the children were 364 badly pock-marked. The stench of refuse, stale fish, camel dung and rotting food was unbearable, and attracted clouds of flies.

144 One noticed a variety of racial types. The Omani Arabs predominated, but one saw also fair-skinned Persians, Bedouins, Sunussi, and negroid types who were obviously ex-slaves. Many of the Arabs, thin-bearded men with hawk-like noses, looked more 443 villainous than any I have seen. We strolled through the bazaar, but the shops were small and untidy and displayed goods of inferior quality. In several of the shops I noticed ancient iron safes, gaudily painted, which were of English manufacture and had obviously 159 been taken from merchantmen by the pirates. There is little doubt that most of the inhabitants of Dera, a vicious, sullen crowd, would gladly have returned to piracy had they been given half a chance.

142 In contrast to their cruel, sardonic faces around us, I was struck by the beauty of some of the children who swarmed at our side, feeling our clothes and touching our hands. A little girl of nine or ten attracted my attention; her perfectly formed features, luminous brown eyes and Grecian lips made me sigh for a pencil and sketchbook. The little boys were delightful creatures too, with laughing eyes and white, even teeth.

• 363 The streets were extremely dark, with high walls on one side and palm-matting completely covering them like a roof, whilst 443 the 'road' was a quagmire of mud and camel dung. Six shops out of every ten exhibited panniers of dried fruits and cereals, figs,